

THE MOSQUITO COAST



WARNER BROS.



plays at college" — he went to Rippon College in Northern Wisconsin after growing up in suburban Chicago — "and it was the most difficult and frightening thing I had ever done, in fact, probably the *only* frightening thing I had ever done.

"It seemed like a wonderful opportunity to have a varied and colorful life. It took me 15 years to realize what a fool I was." Ford is deadpan for a moment before breaking up. "No, I wasn't wrong," he laughs, "but it took 15 years before I was lucky enough to be attached to a success and be able to get work all the time."

That success, of course, was George Lucas' *Star Wars* which catapulted Harrison Ford to international attention in 1977, although the actor insists he had nothing to do with the film's popularity. "It was George's success and I was very pleased and happy to be part of it," he says, "but it was not in anyway a personal success."

He went on to star as Han Solo, pilot of the Millennium Falcon and rogue extraordinaire, in both sequels with never a doubt what he was doing. "I was just so really pleased to see a film so well-intentioned do so well," he says. "When *Star Wars* came out, it was a time of films of revenge, films of violence, all of which I saw as a way of expiating guilt about real social problems. But I never saw a solution to any of these social problems that was adequate.

"*Star Wars* was a real benchmark, because it made available to filmmakers the possibility of doing films which were entertainment. They didn't have to take on social obligation to be taken seriously."

Nearly a decade later there isn't much question that Harrison Ford is making his own success these days. Playing mostly straight-talking, quick-witted men, the 6 ft. 1 inch, blue-eyed actor has become the top-grossing actor in motion picture history. He is also a favorite of the film critics — but that's something he only knows about second hand.

"I don't read reviews," he says, "because if I do, I get hurt personally." He says it without embarrassment, his manliness intact. It's surprising, but it shouldn't be. After all, Harrison Ford has made a career out of proving that strong men are allowed to have feelings.

— Lyle Slack



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I like to have a very strong idea to deal with," Harrison Ford explained a few years ago,

talking about the kind of movie he chooses to make, the kind of character he likes to play.

You look at the pictures the 44 year old actor has appeared in and it's not hard to discern that hunger for powerful ideas and characters — Indiana Jones and Rick Deckard (from *Blade Runner*), both a return to the kind of Hollywood tough guy popular in the 1930s and '40s: Han Solo, a swashbuckling rogue sailing through time and space not on a pirate ship but a space ship: John Book, the Philadelphia detective in *Witness* caught between the worlds of violence and pacifism.

All of them capitalized to one extent or another on Harrison Ford's capacity to play tough men who are nevertheless, clearly sensitive and intelligent. Still, none of those roles tested his ability to fashion a coherent

character out of such diverse qualities as will that of Father in **The Mosquito Coast**, Paul Theroux's apocalyptic and ferociously funny novel about one man's efforts to escape the venality of modern American life.

Just listen for a moment to the novel's narrators. Father's teenage son, on an outing in Northampton, Massachusetts: "Down Main Street ('They're all on drugs') we passed a Getty station and Father howled at the price of gas. TWO SLAIN IN SHOOT-OUT was the sign on a newspaper stand, and he said, "Crapshoots." Just the word *Collectibles*, on a storefront, irritated him. And near the hardware store there was a vending machine that sold ice by the bag.

"They sell ice — ten pounds for a half a buck. But water's as free as air. Those dingbats are selling water! Water's the new growth industry. Mineral water, spring water, sparkling water. It's big news — water's good for you! Low-cal beer — know what's in it? Know why it keeps you thin? Know why it costs more than regular? Water!"

Father is at the centre of a story which *New York* magazine aptly described as "full of poetry and dread," which was undoubtedly enough to scare any number of actors away from attempting the role. Ford took it for precisely the reason others might run, because fear is at the heart of what he does as an actor.

"I went to college and studied philosophy and English literature," recalls Ford, casually handsome in a cranberry shirt buttoned to the neck and black sports coat, his short blonde-brown hair standing up on a square-cut head.

"If I hadn't been kicked out three weeks before graduation, for academic failure," he adds, "I wouldn't have thought of becoming an actor. It never occurred to me before.

"But it was 1964 when it was thought imperative that you have a college degree to get any kind of corporate type job. So when I thought afterwards of what I might like to do, acting is what occurred to me. I had done one or two